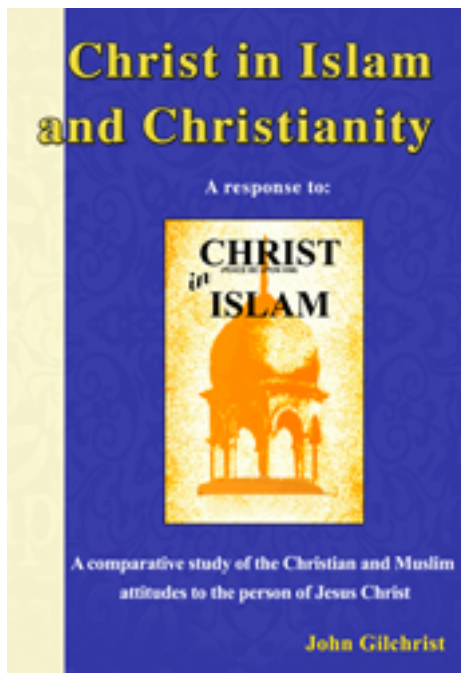


CHRIST IN ISLAM AND CHRISTIANTY

John Gilchrist

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1. CHRIST IN ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY

1.1. A reply to the booklet *Christ in Islam*

During 1983 Ahmed Deedat published a booklet entitled *Christ in Islam*. Although the title presupposes that the author's intent was to produce a general survey of the Islamic concept of Jesus, it is not surprising to find that much of the booklet is a polemic against Christianity. Like most of his publications, Deedat's new booklet appears to be primarily an argument against the Christian faith. We deem it appropriate, in the circumstances, to analyse the issues raised in the booklet and to offer a solid refutation of his arguments. It is not our aim to consider the booklet generally but rather to deal solely with those issues that relate directly to Christian beliefs about Jesus Christ.

We do not hesitate, from the outset, to say that insofar as Deedat has endeavoured to discredit the Biblical accounts of Jesus' life and personality he has failed dismally. A good example appears as early as page 6 of his booklet where he claims that the original name of Jesus was "Isa" (as it is the name given to him in the Qur'an) and that it derives from the Hebrew "Esau". He suggests that Esau is a "very common Jewish name" and that it is "used more than sixty times" in the first book of the Bible, namely Genesis (*Christ in Islam*, p.6). Deedat's overall ignorance of the Bible and Jewish history thus appears early in his booklet, for there is only *one* Esau mentioned in Genesis and he is the brother of Jacob, the true father of the Israelite nation. On every one of those more than sixty occasions it is this Esau alone who is spoken of, and there is no mention anywhere in the Bible of any descendant of Israel being called Esau. The Jews just simply did not call their children by this name.

Jacob and Esau were enemies for most of their lives and their descendants, the Israelites and the Edomites, were often at war with each other. No Jewish children were ever named after the brother of Jacob, the father of the Israelites, for he stood against Jacob and was rejected by God (Hebrews 12:17). It is thus a fallacy to suggest that the original name of Jesus was Esau.

An obvious historical blunder thus appears very early in Deedat's booklet, though the error is not entirely his own. Christian Arabs have always called Jesus *Yasu* after the Aramaic *Yashua* from which comes the Greek *Iesous* and the English Jesus. For reasons that have never been apparent Muhammad chose to call him *Isa*. Deedat's

interpretation of this name as "Esau" tends to lend support to the suggestion made by some that the Jews in Arabic cunningly misled Muhammad by subtly perverting the true name of Jesus into the name of their forefather's irreligious brother. If Deedat's conclusion is correct, it militates heavily against the supposed divine origin of the Qur'an.

There can be no doubt, however, that Esau is no nearer to the original and true name of Jesus than Muhammad's *Isa*. This fundamental error sets the tone for the whole of Deedat's treatment of the contrast between Christ in Islam and Christianity and it is hard to resist the conclusion that the Jesus of the Bible, rather than the *Isa* of the Qur'an, is the true Jesus. We shall proceed to analyse other subjects in Deedat's treatise that relate the *Isa* of the Qur'an to the true Jesus of Christianity.

1.2. MARY IN THE QUR'AN AND THE BIBLE

Deedat has much to say, not only about the Qur'anic teaching about Jesus, but also its teaching about his mother Mary. Under the heading "Mary's birth" he says:

"The story is that the maternal grandmother of Jesus, Hannah, had hitherto been barren. She poured out her heart to God: if only God will grant her a child, she would surely dedicate such a child for the service of God in the temple." (Deedat, *Christ in Islam*, p.9)

Every Christian child who has attended Sunday school knows about the story of Hannah and how she prayed earnestly to God for a son and promised to deliver him to the service of the Lord all his days if her prayer was answered. The only problem is that the child that was born to her was Samuel who became a prophet and

anointed David to be king over Israel about a thousand years before the time of Mary and Jesus! Her prayer is recorded in 1 Samuel 1:11 and later in the same chapter we read:

In due time Hannah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Samuel, for she said, "Because I asked the LORD for him." (1 Samuel 1:20)

How, then, did Mr. Deedat, a supposed "Muslim scholar of the Bible" as he describes himself, come to make such a blunder as to confuse the mother of Samuel with the mother of Mary? The reason is that the Qur'an itself confuses the two women and, although it does not name Hannah, nevertheless records the anachronism which confounds the two women (Sura Al Imran 3:35-36). (Some of the works of Hadith openly say that the name of Mary's mother was indeed Hannah and both ancient and modern commentators of the Qur'an accept that this was her real name.)

On the next page of his booklet Deedat says, "This was the story. But where did Muhammad (pbuh) get this knowledge from? He was an *Ummi* (unlettered). He did not know how to read or write" (*Christ in Islam*, p.10). As an obvious mistake has been made this is a very good question indeed! Deedat refers to the fact that Muhammad was unlettered as a back-up to the claim that the Qur'an is the Word of God. But, as he has clearly mixed up the two women, surely it is obvious that the fact that Muhammad was unlettered is all the more proof that he was the real composer of the book. If he had been well-read in the Jewish Scriptures he would never have made such mistakes.

In fact the whole story of Mary's birth and dedication in the Qur'an is a strange confusion of various passages of the Bible. Mary herself is clearly confused with Elijah, for a start, for he was the prophet confined to solitude who was fed by ravens that brought him food from above (1 Kings 17:6 - the Qur'an states that Mary, too, was fed from heaven in Sura Al Imran 3:37). Nevertheless it is the name given to Mary's mother, namely Hannah, that really gives us the clue as to where the composers of this story obtained their material. We should perhaps at this stage mention that the original story is first found in an apocryphal work entitled *Proto-evangelium of James the Less* and that it was simply taken over by Muhammad into the Qur'an without him being aware of its mystical origin.

The story arises from a confusion between the record of Hannah's prayer for a son and this passage in the Gospel of Luke:

There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. (Luke 2:36-38)

One can clearly see how the anachronism came about. Once again we have a woman whose original Hebrew name was Hannah and yet we find that it is *this* woman who remained in the Temple night and day, significantly worshipping and *fasting* for a good many years. Mary has clearly been confused, not only with Elijah and Samuel, but with Anna the prophetess as well! It is clear that the two respective Hannahs - the

mother of Samuel and the daughter of Phanuel - have been confused with one another and the story in Sura Al Imran 3 in the Qur'an is therefore clearly a peculiar blending of the two totally different stories in the Bible about these two women.

Clearly, therefore, Deedat has committed a major blunder by mixing up the mother of Mary with a woman who lived ten centuries before her. But as if this were not enough he quotes another verse from the Qur'an in his booklet that confuses Mary herself with another woman who lived nearly twenty centuries before her. On page 15 of his *Christ in Islam* he quotes these words which are addressed to Mary by her neighbours:

Yaa ukhta Haaruuna - "O Sister of Aaron".
(Sura Maryam 19:28)

On the next page he quotes Ali's commentary on this title, "Sister of Aaron", where the translator says, "Mary is reminded of her high lineage and the unexceptionable morals of her father and mother." The problem here is that the only *Harun* mentioned in the Qur'an (Aaron in English) is the Levitical priest who was the brother of Moses and who lived nearly two thousand years before Jesus! Moses is expressly quoted as speaking of *Haaruuna akhi* - "Aaron my brother" - in the Qur'an (Sura Ta Ha 20:30). How therefore could Mary, the mother of Jesus, be the sister of Aaron and Moses as well

In this case Muhammad's error cannot be attributed to an apocryphal writing as in the case of Hannah and Samuel. This time the confusion is entirely his own. During his own lifetime he was confronted by Christians with this anachronism and his answer was that the people of old used to

give names to their compatriots after the names of apostles and pious persons who had gone before them (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol.3, p.1169). It is extremely hard to credit this line of reasoning, however, as there is no other instance in the Qur'an where anyone else is so called. Indeed it is also most unlikely that Aaron would be called the brother (*akha*) of Moses in the Qur'an, as often as he is, in the direct sense if Mary was only called his sister (*ukhta*) in a figurative sense. Elsewhere in the Qur'an the word *ukhtun* (a sister) is always applied to an immediate sister (as in Sura al-Nisa 4:12,23,176) and the use of the word in Mary's case can only mean a "blood-sister of Aaron". It cannot sincerely be explained away as meaning one simply named after her ancestor Aaron as Muhammad is said to have suggested.

Even if it was intended to carry this meaning we would still be faced with extreme difficulties, for it leads to untenable suppositions. In those days people were only named as sons or daughters (never brothers or sisters, incidentally) of people from whom they directly descended (e.g. Matthew 1:1 where Jesus is called the "the son of David, the son of Abraham", and Luke 1:5 where Elizabeth is called one of the "daughters of Aaron"). The problem is that Mary was never descended from Aaron at all! Aaron was a Levitical priest, descended with his brother Moses from Levi, one of the sons of Jacob. On the other hand Mary was descended from Judah, one of Jacob's other sons, through the line of David (Luke 1:32). She was not even of the same tribe as Aaron. The only relationship between them was purely national and ethnic, the remotest there could be. It is true Elizabeth is called her

"kinswoman" in Luke 1:36, but if there had been any intermarrying between their ancestors in any way, it must have been on Elizabeth's side. One of her ancestors must have married into the tribe of Judah (which is hardly surprising as, after the exiles to Assyria and Babylon, this tribe constituted the overwhelming remnant of Israel that finally returned to the promised land). On the other hand it is expressly stated in the Bible that Jesus is an eternal high priest after the order of Melchizedek, and he, therefore, could not have been descended in any way from Levi through Aaron. Accordingly his mother Mary could likewise not have had any Levitical blood in her and so was in no way descended from or related to Aaron:

If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the law was given to the people), why was there still need for another priest to come-- one in the order of Melchizedek, *not* in the order of Aaron? For when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a change of the law. He of whom these things are said belonged to a *different tribe*, and no one from that tribe has ever served at the altar. For it is clear that our Lord descended *from Judah*, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. And what we have said is even more clear if another priest like Melchizedek appears, one who has become a priest *not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry* but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life. (Hebrews 7:11-16) (my italics)

It is therefore only too obvious that Mary had no connection with Aaron at all and the title given to her in the Qur'an does indeed appear to be entirely inappropriate. How then did this error arise? We have to turn to the Bible and here we read:

Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand.... (Exodus 15:20)

The woman spoken of here was the *real* sister of Aaron, who lived centuries before the mother of Jesus, and the confusion has arisen because the names of the two women are the same in Hebrew, namely Miriam (as they are in Arabic, viz. *Maryam*).

We have seen that *ukhta Harun* in the Qur'an must mean the blood-sister of Aaron and this is precisely what Miriam was. Muhammad clearly confused *Maryam*, the mother of Jesus, with this woman. Furthermore the evidence is strongly substantiated by the name given to Mary's father in the Qur'an. In the Bible we read about Jochebed: "To Amram she bore Aaron, Moses and their sister Miriam" (Numbers 26:59). So the father of Aaron and Miriam was a man named Amram - and yet this is the very name given to the father of Mary, the mother of Jesus, in the Qur'an! He is called *Imran*, the Arabic form of Amram (as *Ibrahim* is the Arabic form of Abraham). Mary, accordingly, is expressly called *Maryamabnata Imran* - "Mary, daughter of Imran" - in the Qur'an (Sura al-Tahrim 66:12). So she is not only called the sister of Aaron but also the daughter of Imran. We therefore have a double-proof of the fact that she has been confused with Miriam, the true sister of Aaron and daughter of Amram.

Furthermore it may well be asked *why* Mary is called the "sister of Aaron" in the Qur'an if she is not confused with Miriam. We have shown that she was in no way descended from him and no more closely related to him than to any other patriarch or figurehead of Israel. Accordingly, what relevance is there in the appellation? Why was she called after Aaron rather than Moses, Elijah, Solomon, Joseph or some

other prophet? Not only can we find no relevance in the title, the passage quoted above from the Book of Hebrews also makes it plain that it is, on the contrary, all-conceived and quite inappropriate.

Not only, therefore, does the Qur'an confuse the two Hannahs but also the Marys as well. Deedat is at pains in his booklet to try to show that the Qur'anic account of Mary's life is superior to that of the Bible, but when it patently contains such anachronisms as those we have considered, surely it is obvious that the Biblical account is the true one.

Three more points made by Deedat about Mary should be treated briefly in conclusion. On one page he quotes Sura Al Imran 3:42 where angels are quoted as saying to Mary that God had "chosen thee above the women of all nations" and comments:

Such an honour is not to be found given to Mary even in the Christian Bible! (Deedat, *Christ in Islam*, p.8)

This charge is completely unfounded for the Bible makes exactly the same point as that made in the verse quoted from the Qur'an when it quotes Elizabeth as saying to Mary:

Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! (Luke 1:42)

In fact it is in this verse that we find out why Mary was preferred above all women of all nations. The statement that she was chosen as such, in both the Qur'an and the Bible, appears solely in the context of the promise that she was to bear a son, the holy child Jesus, the Messiah so long awaited (Sura Al Imran 3:45; Luke 1:31-33). "Blessed is the child you will

bear," Elizabeth so rightly said. Mary was only the greatest among women, chosen above the women of all nations, because she *gave birth to the greatest among men, chosen above the men of all nations as the Saviour of the world, even Jesus Christ.*

The second point made by Deedat worth considering is that there is a whole chapter in the Qur'an, *Sura Maryam* (Sura 19), "named in honour of Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ (pbuh)" (*Christ in Islam*, p.11). He would have done even better to disclose that Mary is the *only woman expressly mentioned by name* in the Qur'an, and that on many occasions. No other woman is so named. Muhammad did well to give such prominence to her, but surely it is clear that Mary was only worthy of such honour because she was the mother of the most prominent man who ever lived, namely Jesus Christ.

Lastly Deedat, always seeking occasion to find fault with the Bible, criticises the title "woman" used by Jesus when addressing his mother in John 2:4, alleging that Jesus "behaved insolently towards his mother" (*Christ in Islam*, p.19). He suggests that it would have been more appropriate to have simply called her "mother".

Once again Deedat exposes his ignorance of the Bible and the times in which it was written, for the title "woman" was an *endearing title* of respect and was so used by Jesus whenever he addressed women. In one passage we read that the Jewish leaders sought to stone a woman caught in adultery and asked Jesus for his verdict in the matter. He replied: "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her" (John 8:7). When they had all walked away he gently said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one

condemned you?" (John 8:10). "'No one, sir,' she said. 'Then neither do I condemn you,' Jesus declared. 'Go now and leave your life of sin'" (John 8:11). While compassionately extending to her the hand of mercy he called her "woman". Was this "insolent behaviour"? The title was purely one of honour and respect, like "Madame" in French or "Dame" in Afrikaans.

Jesus also used the title when comforting the woman of Samaria (John 4:21) and once again addressed his mother in this way as he was dying on the cross, and saw her and his beloved disciple John standing next to her. He said to her:

Dear woman, here is your son. (John 19:26)

He then said to John, "Here is your mother" and from that hour "the disciple took her into his home" (John 19:27). Even though he was enduring all the horrors of the cross, he did not forget his mother and tenderly committed her to his closest disciple among the men who followed him. After his resurrection he again used the title "woman" when speaking to Mary Magdalene, his closest disciple among the women who followed him (John 20:15). No one sincerely reading these narratives can possibly draw the conclusion that the title "woman" was anything but a gentle title of respect.

In conclusion we can only say that Deedat has made a sorry mess of his treatment of Mary's life and the titles given to her in the Qur'an and the Bible. There can be little doubt that the Biblical record of Mary's honour, lineage and life is the true one.

1.3. THE EXCLUSIVE TITLE GIVEN TO JESUS

Not only does Deedat show in his statements about the mother of Jesus that he has very little real knowledge of the Bible but this ignorance is once again apparent in his brief consideration of the title given to Jesus in the Bible, namely the Christ. He points out that the original Hebrew word *masaha* (from which comes *mashiah*, i.e. the Messiah, or the Christ) was a general word denoting any kind of anointing and that it was used of priests, pillars, tabernacles, etc., which were set apart for worship and duly consecrated for this purpose.

His argument then runs that, whereas Jesus is called the Messiah in the Bible or, as it is in the Greek, *Christos*, this does not make him unique in any way as "every prophet of God is so anointed or appointed" (*Christ in Islam*, p.13).

He goes on to state that in Islam certain titles are given to certain prophets which, in a general sense, apply to all prophets. He says that whereas Muhammad is called *rasulullah* (messenger of Allah) and Moses *kalimullah* (word of Allah), these titles apply to all prophets, for each was a messenger of God with whom God spoke regularly. His conclusion, therefore, is that the title *Christos* is in no way unique and that Jesus was accordingly no different to the other messengers of God.

Once again his ignorance is exposed, for the title given to Jesus in the Bible is actually (in the original Greek) *ho Christos*, that is, "the Christ". The use of the definite article renders the title exclusive in a very real sense and reveals that Jesus was indeed *the Messiah*, God's Anointed One, in a way that none of the other prophets were. Indeed the same construction appears in the Qur'an where

Jesus is called *al-Masih*, that is, the only one to whom this title applies.

Indeed in the Qur'an Jesus is also called a *rasul* on at least ten occasions (see, for example, Sura al-Nisa 4:171 where he is expressly called a *rasulullah*) and in Sura Al Imran 3:45 is called a *kalimatim-minhu*, that is, a "Word from Him". But the title *al-Masih*, the Messiah, is applied to Jesus alone in the Qur'an and in the Bible the same title *ho Christos* likewise can be applied to no one else. Jesus was in a very unique way the Messiah and the title is his alone.

Deedat, of course, aims at reducing Jesus to the level of ordinary prophethood and thus finds this exclusive title the Messiah, (or the Christ), very awkward and a cause of offence. His argument, however, is based entirely on the false presumption that the title was never applied to Jesus in a very unique sense.

The Qur'an, while fittingly calling Jesus *al-Masih*, makes no attempt to explain the title. What, then, was its true meaning? One needs no Christian efforts here to transmute "base metals into shining gold" (*Christ in Islam*, p.13), as Deedat wishfully imagines, to exalt the statues of Messiah above that of ordinary prophethood. For it was the *Jews* who spoke of a coming climactic figure whom they named the Messiah after an express use of this title in their Scriptures to so describe him (Daniel 9:26). Throughout the Scriptures of the earlier prophets they rightly found constant predictions of the coming of God's Anointed, one who would not be an ordinary prophet but the ultimate Saviour of the whole world. (Examples are Isaiah 7:14;9:6-7;42:1-4; Jeremiah 23:5-6; Micah 5:2-4 and Zechariah 6:12-13). He

would establish the kingdom of God forever in justice and righteousness and would rule over the nations. He would at first be humbled (Isaiah 53:1-12) and cut off from the land of the living (Daniel 9:26), but at his return at the end of time he would bring the salvation and judgement of God, ruling in justice and glory over his righteous subjects while bringing his enemies from all over the world into submission at his feet (Psalm 110:1).

The Jews knew that this exalted figure, the Messiah, was coming and when Jesus came they openly speculated whether it might be him (John 7:31,41-43;10:24; Matthew 26:63). On a number of occasions he openly confirmed that he was indeed the Messiah (John 4:26; Matthew 16:17; Mark 14:62) and told the Jews that he would return in a cloud with power and great glory and that they would see him seated at the right hand of God (Matthew 26:64). It requires no supposed Christian "juggling of words" (*Christ in Islam*, p.13) to exalt Jesus to the status of God's eternal Saviour and Messiah. The Jews themselves knew that the Messiah would not be made of "base metals" like the other prophets but would, in comparison, indeed be "shining gold" which Jesus surely was!

The Jews tragically rejected their Messiah, the fulfilment of their hopes, and so were cut off very shortly afterwards (AD 70), and to this day their religion has lost all its original meaning and glory. A more ironical tragedy is the attitude of the Muslim world, which in one breath acknowledges that Jesus was indeed the Messiah but in another claims that he was only a prophet. The whole meaning of the title is missed completely in Islam.

Jesus Christ is the exclusive Saviour of the world, the unique Messiah whom God sent for the healing of the nations. The title is his alone and exalts him to the status he alone enjoys among the sons of men - the King of Glory who will rule throughout eternity.

1.4. A CONSIDERATION OF THE BIRTH OF JESUS

Deedat's prejudices against the Christian Bible find further expression in his treatment of the conception and birth of Jesus. He quotes Luke 1:35, which records the words of the angel Gabriel to Mary to the effect that the Holy Spirit would "come upon" her and that the power of the Most High would "overshadow" her. He comments on these words:

The language used here is distasteful - gutter language - you agree!?! (Deedat, *Christ in Islam*, p.24)

In his booklet the words "gutter language" are emphasised in bold print. Someone has said, "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." It seems the converse is equally true. Deedat implies that there is something immoral about the Biblical account of the conception of Jesus. He very significantly omits the rest of the verse: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). The whole verse is set in an awesome context of holiness. Because this child was to be conceived, not by the medium of impure flesh, but by the power of the Holy Spirit, *therefore* the child would not be impure and sinful like all other men, but would be *holy*, even the

Son of God. How anyone can see anything distasteful in this is beyond understanding. The Qur'an itself teaches that the reason for the conception of Jesus by divine power alone was his unique holiness (Sura Maryam 19:19). These words apply:

To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted. (Titus 1:15)

In Luke's Gospel one often reads of their Holy Spirit coming upon people and in every case the expression implies an anointing of his holy influence. Simeon was a man "righteous and devout" and the "Holy Spirit was upon him" (Luke 2:25) and when Jesus was baptised and was praying, the "Holy Spirit descended upon him" (Luke 3:22). Likewise we read that when the glory of God appeared above Jesus when he was transfigured, "a cloud appeared and enveloped them" (Luke 9:34). How can anyone say, when similar expressions are used of the conception of Jesus (i.e. that the Holy Spirit "came upon" Mary and that the power of God "overshadowed" her), that this is "distasteful - gutter language"?

It is quite clear that the words used to describe the manner in which the Christ-child would be conceived are generally used in the Bible to describe any occasion where a very real anointing of the power and holiness of God might come upon a person. We really cannot see what the basis of Deedat's argument is and are once again led to the impression that he must be prejudiced against the Christian faith to make such unwarranted charges against it. His efforts to compare the Biblical version of the birth of Jesus unfavourably with the Qur'anic version of

the same event prove to be equally futile when he says:

For God to create a Jesus, without a human father, He merely has to will it. If he wants to create a million Jesus' without fathers or mothers, He merely has to will them into existence. (Deedat, *Christ in Islam*, p.24)

This begs the obvious question - why did God not create a "million Jesus' without fathers or mothers"? Surely the fact that only *one* man was conceived in this way shows that it was *not* the will of God that many should thus be conceived without fathers. On the contrary, it was clearly his express will that only one unique personality was destined to be born in this way. This also demands the probability that there was something very unique about the man Jesus for him to be conceived in this way. All ordinary men have natural fathers and mothers - prophets included. There can be only one reason why Jesus had no human father. Being the Son of the eternal Father it was absolutely essential that he be conceived in human form in an unusual way, without human intervention and by the power of the Spirit of God alone. This is surely quite obvious.

It also does not help Deedat to quote from Yusuf Ali's translation and commentary on the Qur'an in respect of Sura Al Imran 3:59 where the commentator points to the fact that Adam had neither father nor mother and so has a greater right (as Deedat suggests on page 26 of his booklet) to be called the Son of God. Adam was *created* in a full adult state when it was not possible he be born of human parents. Someone had to be created first. But Jesus was *born* of a woman alone when God's natural order of procreation had been in

effect for centuries. It is obvious why Adam had no father or mother. But what was the reason why God should interrupt the natural order of procreation so that Jesus could be born of a mother only? There is no reasonable alternative to the following explanation given in the Bible which thoroughly *contrasts* Jesus and Adam:

The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. (1 Corinthians 15:47)

Adam was just an ordinary, natural man into whom God breathed the breath of life. Jesus, however, was an eternal personality, a life-giving spirit, who came from heaven and whose conception, therefore, had to involve an interruption of the natural, earthly course of the human race. He was the breath of life and those who believe in him receive eternal life and shall be transformed into his heavenly likeness in the course of time.

1.5. MELCHIZEDEK - A TYPE OF THE CHRIST TO COME

We proceed to consider Deedat's manner of dealing with the resemblance between Jesus and his forerunner, Melchizedek. He says of the latter that he is "another person greater than Jesus" (*Christ in Islam*, p.26) and quotes Hebrews 7:3, which says that Melchizedek was without father, mother or descent, and had neither beginning of days nor end of life. After this description three innocuous-looking dots follow in Deedat's booklet (p.26). This is not unusual - the phenomenon occurs in other booklets Deedat has written (see No.1 in this series, *The Crucifixion of Christ: A Fact, not Fiction*) and in pamphlets published by his Islamic Propagation Centre. These three dots invariably stand for certain words that

have been discreetly omitted from the text by Deedat *because they refute the very point he is trying to make*. A remarkable phenomenon indeed! We shall quote the whole passage from Hebrew, placing in italics the words of the text casually suppressed by Deedat and replaced by three little dots:

This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, his name means "king of righteousness"; then also, "king of Salem" means "king of peace." Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, *like the Son of God he remains a priest forever.* (Hebrews 7:1-3)

The closing words in italics openly refute the point Deedat is labouring to make, that is, that Melchizedek was "greater than Jesus" for they show plainly that he only *resembles* the Son of God. He was thus only a forerunner, a type, a shadow and limited example of the eternal High Priest to come.

The point made in the passage quoted Hebrews is that *the Scriptures* do not contain a genealogy of Melchizedek, not that he actually had no genealogy. They simply do not mention his father, mother or genealogy, nor do they tell us when he was born or when he died. He appears in a brief passage in Genesis 14 where he is described as the king of Salem who met Abraham returning from a slaughter of the people who captured his nephew Lot. He is openly described as a "priest of God Most High" (Genesis 14:18) but apart from these notes, no other mention is made of him.

The argument set forth in the Epistle to the Hebrews is that Jesus was not a Levitical

priest after the order of Aaron but an eternal high priest after the order of Melchizedek. This means that as the latter's beginning and end are not specifically mentioned in the Bible, so in this respect he prefigures Jesus who was actually from heaven, an eternal being who really has no beginning or end in an absolute sense. Melchizedek only *resembled* him - the point Deedat subtly obscures - and the brief description of his character as a priest of God to whom Abraham paid tithes serves as an example of the ultimate, true minister of God to come, Jesus Christ.

1.6. JESUS - THE ETERNAL SON OF THE LIVING GOD

The latter part of Deedat's booklet contains a relentless and at times uncouth attack on the Christian doctrine and Biblical teaching that Jesus is the Son of God. Nevertheless he is obliged to concede that from at least one point of view, "he is pre-eminently the Son of God" (*Christ in Islam*, p.29). On page 28 he quotes a number of texts to show that the expression "son of God" is found often in the Bible in contexts where people are being described generally as children of God. He then concludes that when Jesus claimed to be the Son of God he was also only speaking in a metaphorical sense and that Christians err when they say that he was the eternal Son of God.

No one can possibly draw such a conclusion without overlooking a wealth of evidence in the Bible that shows that Jesus was the Son of God in a unique and absolute sense. On numerous occasions he made statements that make this point very clearly. Consider this verse:

All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. (Luke 10:22)

As the Jews once testified, "No one ever spoke the way this man does" (John 7:46). No other prophet used such language to identify himself. All things, said Jesus, had been delivered to him and no one could know the Father unless *the* Son actually revealed him. Here is a similar quotation which shows that Jesus considered himself the Son of God in an absolute sense, a quote which, like many others, is expediently ignored in Deedat's booklet:

Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him. (John 5:22-23)

If we are all children of God, as Deedat imagines (p.29), why did Jesus say that all men should honour *him* as the Son of God just as they honour the Father? Indeed throughout the Gospels we find teachings that show that Jesus regarded himself as the unique, eternal Son of God. On one occasion he told a parable about a householder who planted a vineyard and let it out to tenants. When the season for fruit came the owner sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit, but one by one they maltreated them and sent them away empty-handed, beating one and wounding another. The owner of the vineyard then said to himself:

What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him. (Luke 20:13)

But when the tenants saw him, they

promptly rejected him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him. Jesus then concluded that the owner would destroy those tenants and let the vineyard out to others. Immediately the Jews "knew he had spoken this parable against them" (Luke 20:19). The perception was well-founded and the interpretation of the parable is obvious. God had allowed the Jews to live in a land he had given them as an inheritance, yet they constantly rebelled against him. He sent his servants the prophets but these too they rejected and often maltreated. Eventually after they had cast Jesus out of their midst and killed him, God brought destruction upon them and they were uprooted from the land of Palestine while Jerusalem became a heap of ruins (this was forty years after Jesus had ascended to heaven and occurred under the onslaught of the Roman tribune Titus).

The vital point in the parable is the identification of the last messenger to the tenants as the *beloved* son of the owner, as distinct from the former messengers who were only servants. Jesus clearly distinguished himself from the former prophets in this parable, showing that whereas they were only God's servants, he was his beloved Son. This was confirmed on at least two occasions when God himself spoke from heaven and said of Jesus:

This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. (Matthew 3:17)

On another occasion Jesus asked his disciples who the people thought he was. They answered that it was generally believed that he was one of the prophets. So he asked them who they thought he was and Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the

Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16) to which Jesus answered that he was especially blessed for he had not perceived this through human wisdom but through a revelation from above. It is not possible to honestly conclude, from a genuine study of his teaching, that Jesus ever regarded himself as anything less than the eternal, unique Son of God. These words sum up his teaching:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

God *sent his only Son*, a teaching found constantly in the Bible. (For a treatment of the use of the word "begotten" in the King James Version and Deedat's arguments about it, see Nr.3 in this series, *The Textual History of the Qur'an and the Bible*).

Those who are God's children on earth, his sons and daughters in a lesser sense, are so because God has become their Father and has chosen to treat them as his children. But Jesus was his eternal Son, who came from him into the world so that others might become children of God. The whole distinction between Jesus as the absolute, eternal Son of God, and Christians who have become the sons of God is put exceptionally well in these words:

But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law. (Galatians 4:4)

God *sent his Son* so that many others might attain *adoption as sons*. Jesus taught this quite plainly as well, saying "I came from God and now am here" (John 8:42). Yet another verse makes this abundantly clear:

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. (John 3:17)

Jesus was the *only Son from the Father* (John 1:18) and he regarded himself as such in all his teaching. He never claimed to be the son of God in the sense that all true believers are children of God. Speaking of the day of his return he said that no one knows the day: "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Matthew 24:36). Here there is a clear progression of authority, viz. men - angels - the Son - the Father. Quite clearly Jesus spoke of himself in only one ultimate context - above the angels as the only Son of the eternal Father. He describes his status in terms that relate to the Divine Being alone.

Deedat goes on to deal with the statement of Jesus, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30), saying that its context shows that this does not mean that Jesus was one with his Father in omniscience, nature or omnipotence, but only "one in purpose" (*Christ in Islam*, p.37). To set the quotation in its context he quotes verses 27-29 before it and says:

How can anyone be so blind as not to see the exactness of the ending of the last two verses? But spiritual blinkers are more impervious than physical defects. (*Christ in Islam*, p.37)

One wonders where the blindness really is and who it is whose spiritual eyes are restricted by blinkers, for Deedat casually glosses over a remarkable statement made by Jesus in one of the very verses he is referring to, where Jesus says of those who are his true followers:

I give them eternal life. (John 10:28)

Who but God alone can give not only life but *eternal life*? One has to read such statements, not only in their immediate context, but in the whole context of Jesus' overall teaching about himself. At another time he said:

For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. (John 5:21)

This statement shows that the Son indeed possesses the same omnipotence as the Father. At the end of his earthly course Jesus again spoke of the Father giving him "For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him" (John 17:2). The statement "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30) made by Jesus, is one which he made no attempt to qualify, and it does not behove any interpreter to restrict its meaning to "one in purpose". At face value it clearly means "one in all things" and Jesus would hardly have made such a striking claim without qualifying it if he had not intended to convey the impression that there was an absolute oneness between the Father and the Son and that he therefore possessed deity. It is no wonder the Jews so understood his claim (John 10:33).

Furthermore it is intriguing to find that Deedat has placed certain words in capitals in the verses referred to earlier, namely the statement of Jesus that no one could pluck his followers from his hand, nor from his Father's hand. How could Jesus make such a claim unless he possessed the *same power* to preserve his followers that his Father possessed? It is surely clear to those whose eyes are not blinded by their presuppositions against the teaching of

Jesus in the Bible, that Jesus did not claim that he was one with his Father in purpose alone *but also in the possession of the absolute, eternal power required to execute that purpose to complete effect.*

The whole problem with Deedat is that, being a Muslim, he approaches the Bible with the presumption that Jesus is not the eternal Son of God and so could never have claimed to be such. He therefore cannot read the Bible with an open mind and interpret it consistently. When he is met with plain statements that show that Jesus again and again claimed to be the Son of God, he cannot simply accept them. His presumptions oblige him to either overlook and ignore them when he cannot counter them, or misinterpret and pervert them whenever he thinks he can.

Towards the close of his booklet he mentions two incidents in the life of Jesus which prove this point very adequately. He finds an occasion where Jesus taught that to enter life, one must keep the commandments of God (Matthew 19:17) and makes much of this because such teaching seems to coincide with Islamic dogma. Here, however, he falls into the very trap he cautions against elsewhere in his booklet by wrenching this statement out of its context. What follows does not suit his argument so he ignores it. Jesus went on to show the young man he was addressing that no one can keep God's laws perfectly and so enter life in this way. The young man was very rich and Jesus said to him:

If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me. (Matthew 19:21)

It may be true today that "no one is

perfect" but God surely is and he will judge us by his own standards of perfection. A limited attempt to keep his laws is not acceptable to him, and who keeps them perfectly? When Jesus made this young man realise that he could not do so, he showed him another way to life: *If you want to be perfect...follow me.*

The second incident concerns the raising of Lazarus from dead. Because Jesus was moved in his spirit and prayed to his Father about the matter Deedat concludes that he could not have been the eternal Son of God. Once again, however, he casually ignores the context of this prayer and expediently overlooks an outstanding claim made by Jesus at the very time this wonderful miracle was performed:

I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. (John 11:25-26)

The words in the original Greek introducing this statement are emphatic, meaning, "I, I am the resurrection and the life," or, "I myself am the resurrection and the life." This means that Jesus himself, in a unique and absolute sense, is the resurrection and the life. It is little wonder that he is called the "Author of life" (Acts 3:15) elsewhere in the Bible. No one who did not have an eternal nature could ever have made such a claim. Such words can be spoken by one whose nature is deity alone.

The great mistake that Deedat makes when he reads the Bible is that he does not objectively seek to discover what it says, but approaches it with presumptions about what it *should* say. Christians read the Bible earnestly desiring to know what

Jesus said about himself and throughout history they have universally drawn the conclusion that he taught that he was the eternal Son of God who came in human form to redeem the world. It is a conclusion they draw from an open assessment of the contents of the books they read. But men like Deedat have decided in advance, before they even pick up a Bible, what it *should* say about Jesus. Because he believes that Jesus was only a prophet and not the Son of God, he approaches the Bible with the presumption that it should support this belief and wherever he can he attempts to pervert or distort its teaching to yield this presumption.

Deedat is thus totally unqualified and unfit to interpret the Bible. How is it that the Christian Church has universally held that Jesus is the eternal Son of God if the Bible does not teach this? Deedat's attempts to disprove this do not arise from a sincere assessment of Biblical teaching but from a presumption that it should not yield such a doctrine. It is quite clear who is reading the book with "blinkers". It is the Islamic propagandist whose ability to read the Bible sincerely and objectively is blinkered by his dogmatic presumption that it should not teach that Jesus is the Son of God.

In conclusion we can only say that he exposes himself in no uncertain terms when he attempts to treat John 1:1 in a supposedly scholarly way on pages 40-41 of his booklet. The whole verse reads:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1)

He says that the Greek word for God in the

clause "and the Word was with God" is *hotheos* and that in the latter clause "and the Word was God" the word is *tontheos*. He relates a discussion between himself and a Reverend Morris in which his apparently exceptional knowledge of Greek allegedly enabled him to confound and silence the reverend completely. We stand absolutely amazed, for the supposed "Muslim scholar of the Bible" has done nothing but expose an appalling ignorance of the Greek text. It is in the *first* clause that the word is *tontheos* and in the second it is simply *theos*, that is, God. On this palpable error Deedat builds an apparently convincing argument in his booklet!

He says, therefore, that *tontheos* means "a god" and that John 1:1 therefore teaches that "the Word was a god". This supposedly disproves the deity of Jesus Christ. Yet the original Greek reads that *ho logos*, that is, "the Word", was *theos*, that is "God". The verse thus correctly reads "The Word was God", a statement comprehensively endorsing the deity of Christ. Thus Deedat's arguments slide completely to the ground through a shocking error of his own making, caused by his ignorance of the Bible. His booklets against the Christian faith constantly reveal two extremes - a bold confidence in his points on the one hand matched only by an obvious lack of substance in them on the other!

Surely little further evidence is needed to show that Deedat has little qualification of pose as a "Muslim scholar of the Bible". His arguments and confident manner might lead unwary Muslims who are ignorant of the Bible into thinking he is a great critic of the book but, as Jesus said, it is wrong and foolish to judge purely by appearances (John 7:24). As this reply to

his *Christ in Islam* shows, a Christian with a sound knowledge of the Bible can disprove his arguments without much difficulty and at times with contemptuous ease. The glaring mistakes he makes and the perversion of Biblical teaching that he practises show conclusively that his crusade against Christianity is thoroughly unwarranted and that, in his attempts to expose the Bible, he really only succeeds in exposing himself.

2. THE GOD THAT "NEVER WAS"?

2.1. A reply to the booklet *The God that Never Was*

During 1983 the Islamic Propagation Centre published a booklet entitled *The God that Never Was*, which had first been published as an article in a local Muslim newspaper *Al-Balaagh* in 1980, as a response to a reply I had written to certain lectures against the Christian faith by Ahmed Deedat on cassette tapes. The booklet contains a large number of quotations from the Bible, chiefly from the four Gospels, which all relate to the earthly life Jesus lived for thirty-three years in human form. Each one of these quotes is headed by a title in which the name of Jesus is substituted by "God", and comments are made about his humanity which appear to ridicule the Christian belief in his deity. The author of the booklet sets out his purpose in these words:

In our headings and subheadings we have referred to Jesus as "God" in inverted commas in order to show the ABSURDITY of the claim of this man that Jesus is God! (*The God that Never Was*, pp. 2-3)

A brief selection of passages from the Gospels quoted in the booklet and the headings above them illustrate the manner in which the author has set out to ridicule the deity of Christ:

The Ancestors of "God": "The generations of Jesus Christ, the son for David, the son of Abraham" (Matthew 1:1). (p.3)

"God" was Twelve Years Old when His Parents Took Him to Jerusalem: "Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast" (Luke 2:41-42). (p.6)

"God" Was a Tribal Jew: "The Lion of the Tribe of Judah" (Revelation 5:5). (p.9)

As any reader of the booklet can see, the scriptures quoted relate primarily to the humanity of Jesus and his brief life on earth. The thrust of the essay is that Jesus could not have been God because he was a man and was subject to all the natural limitations of the human race (i.e. ancestry, nationality, human emotion, physical weakness, etc.).

The author of this essay, unnamed in the booklet but said to be one Mohammed Seepye in the issue of *Al-Balaagh* in which it occurs, has casually glossed over and paid no attention to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, but has instead set forth Christian belief in Jesus as God absolutely (that is, to the exclusion of the Father and the Holy Spirit and without reference to the office of Jesus as the Son of God). He knew that when Christians say that Jesus is God this means that he shares the divine nature of the Father (a point carefully made by me in the very quotations the article contains from my

reply to Deedat's tapes) with the Holy Spirit in a threefold Trinity. But he has subtly reversed this by misrepresenting the Christian doctrine, setting it forth as a belief that God, the subject, is Jesus, and has based his whole argument on this premise.

Muslims rightly claim that Islam is often misunderstood and misrepresented in the West. That is true, but it is equally true to say that Muslims do the same thing with Christian beliefs about Jesus Christ. They either just do not understand of the deity of Christ or consciously misrepresent it to suit their purposes. It is a fundamental Christian doctrine that Jesus is the *Son of man* as well as the *Son of God*. There is no validity in any argument against the deity of Jesus which is based exclusively on the human limitations he deliberately assumed during his brief course on earth. It will be a welcome change to discover in Jesus as the Son of God based sincerely on that doctrine exactly as it is set forth in the Bible, and not on a misrepresentation of it such as we find in Seepye's article. There is one passage in the Bible that answers the whole theme of this article very comprehensively:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:5-8)

The Greek word for "appearance" used in this passage carries the meaning "essence" or "nature". An appropriate illustration of this meaning is our cliché "an apple to the core", meaning that it is an apple through

and through. This is what the word used here for "appearance" means. The passage thus teaches that the original nature and essence of Jesus was that of deity alone and that, reverently speaking, "through and through". Nevertheless, unlike Adam, the first man, who sought to be like God by eating of the tree of good and evil, Jesus, though he was divine by nature and enjoyed the very same essence as the eternal Father in heaven, did not consider it essential to his glory to hold on to that status in heaven. Instead, in perfect humility, he condescended to become a man and was thus found "in appearance as a man" (that is, he became man through and through). As men are by nature servants of God he thus also "appeared" as a servant he was not a servant of God by nature. The point is that *he voluntarily put off his divine glory for a season and took human form so that he might redeem men and women and thus bridge the gap between God and man that sin had created*. This was the fundamental purpose of his coming to earth in human form.

His perfect humility and condescending grace led him even further than Adam, as a natural servant of God, had ever been required to go. He became *obedient to death, even death on a cross*. From the throne of heaven he descended to the lowest places on earth. This, however, was done that sinful men might be raised to the high status of children of God through his redeeming work. In consequence of his plunge to the depths of human wretchedness God has raised him above the heights of the heavens:

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under

the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:9-11)

Before him, in ages to come, in his eternal glory which he has now resumed, all man and all angels shall bow and acknowledge him, whether in praise or in belated deference to his true status.

In the light of the fact that he *took* human nature and voluntarily *chose* to subject himself to all the limitations and weaknesses of that nature, one can surely see that no case against his deity based on his humanity (including the ancestry he elected to share, the nationality he assumed, and the human course he adopted) has any substance. In virtually every case where the expression "God" appears in the headings in Seepye's article one can comfortably substitute the expression the *Son of man* without any inverted commas, and the titles make good sense. (I say in *virtually* every case deliberately, as some of the headings also misrepresent the meaning of the texts quoted underneath).

Christians do *not* say that "Allah is Christ, the son of Mary" as the Qur'an alleges they do (*innallaaha huwal Masihubnu Maryam* - Sura al-Ma'ida 5:72), that is, that God is Jesus. We believe that God is a Supreme Being in a threefold unity of persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and that the Son alone took human form as the man Christ Jesus.

We *do* believe that the Son is subject to the authority of the Father (the very titles imply an equality in essence and nature between them on the one hand and the subjection of one to the other on the other hand). We do also believe that the Son was

sent into the world according to the Father's purpose and will, as Jesus himself said: "I have not come on my own; but he sent me" (John 8:42). Likewise we accept that he does nothing of his own accord but only what the Father wills and does and, because he is the eternal Son of God, has omnipotent power to put this divine will and activity into effect (John 5:19). These are basic Christian teachings.

The fundamental difference between the Christian and Muslim concepts of Christ is not in their understanding of his subjection to a higher authority, nor in their common conviction that he was a human being in every respect while on earth. With Muslims, we accept that he spoke only as he was commanded to speak (John 12:49) and that there is one greater than he (John 14:28). We differ primarily in our beliefs about his nature for Islam allows him no more than humanity and prophethood, whereas Christianity teaches that God spoke through him, not as a prophet, but as a Son through whom he made all things, who reflects his glory, and who is "the exact representation of his being" (Hebrews 1:3).

Booklets like *The God that Never Was* which represent Jesus in Christian doctrine as God absolutely, with no reference to the Father and the Holy Spirit or to his subjection to the former in authority, misrepresent Christianity altogether. Such publications accordingly serve no useful purpose. If Muslims would only assess this doctrine for what it really is, they would find it not as far removed from their own as they generally suppose, and would perhaps come to a truer and closer knowledge of who Jesus really is - not a "god" who "never was" but the eternal Son from heaven who truly remains the "same

yesterday, today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8).

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4. QUIZ

If you have read this booklet carefully, you will be able to answer the following questions:

1. Who is Esau in the Bible? Why do Jews not name their children after him?
2. Who is the barren Hannah who prayed for a child and was answered? What is the name of her child?
3. How do you explain the Qur'an calling Mary the mother of Jesus "the sister of Aaron"?
4. How does the Qur'an honour the virgin Mary, and what does the New Testament say about her?
5. How do you explain that Jesus is the "apostle of God"?
6. Why was Jesus born of a virgin without a human Father?
7. What is the difference between Adam and Jesus?
8. How was Melchizedek a type of the Christ to come?
9. How can you explain that Jesus is the Son of the eternal living God?

10. Why does Jesus call us to follow him?
11. Explain: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1).
12. How was Jesus true man and true God at the same time?

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The Good Way

P.O. BOX 66

CH-8486 Rikon

Switzerland

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